



## Joe Armstrong Stoneware Coolers

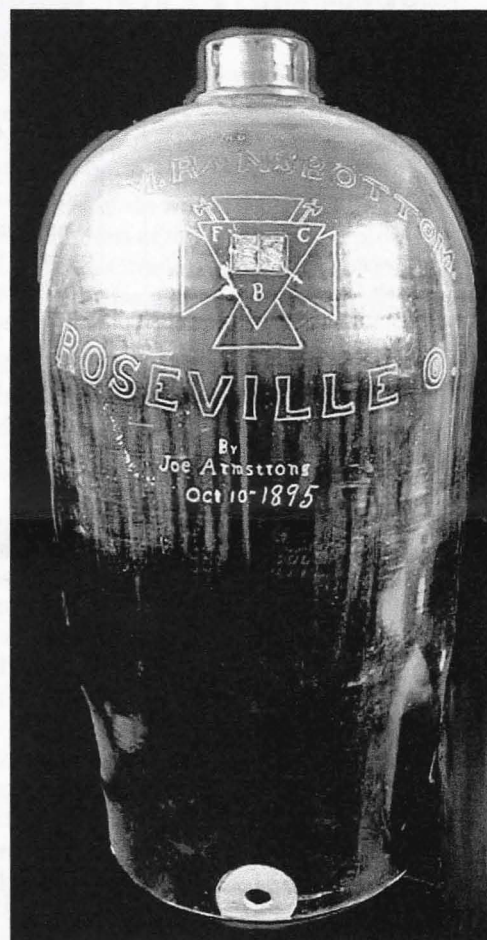


Photo left, an Albany slip sgraffito two-handed thirty gallon cooler created by Joe Armstrong for W.J. Watt dated August 29, 1895. [Photo courtesy of Dennis Thompson.] Photo right, an Albany slip sgraffito single-handed cooler measuring 39 ½ inches high. It is inscribed "MADE FOR E. M. RANSBOTTOM/ROSEVILLE, O./ By/ Joe Armstrong/Oct 10<sup>th</sup> 1895." [Photo courtesy of Crocker Farms, Inc.]

*By James L. Murphy*

One of two known stoneware coolers of remarkably large size (ca. 30 gallons) and made at the **Brilliant Stoneware Company**, near Rose Farm, in York Township, Morgan County, Ohio, sold at auction on April 10, at Crocker Farm, Inc. in York, Pennsylvania for \$5,865.00 (*Antiques and Auction News*, May 7, 2010).

This magnificent example of local stoneware was on display for some thirty years at the Zanesville Art Institute. Although the present curator could not confirm the fact, saying there was no record or recollection that the museum had ever owned the cooler or had it on loan, it was seen there for many

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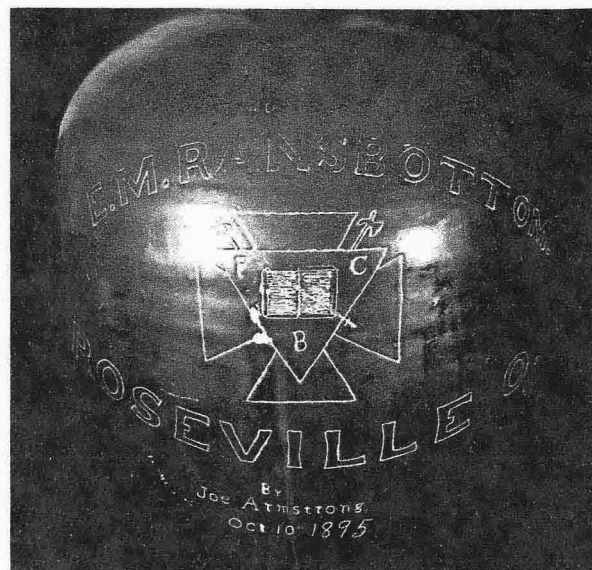
**Joe Armstrong Stoneware Coolers Photos**

Photo top, a closer view of the detailed inscription on the E.M. Ransbottom cooler. Photo above, a side view of the cooler shows the single handle. [Photos courtesy of Crocker Farms, Inc.]



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years by many people, including the author. It is a sad fact that this museum-quality example of local folk art is no longer on display in the area where it was made.

The Crocker Farm auction catalog concluded that the cooler was "made to be displayed as an advertising piece for the **E. M. Ransbottom Pottery** in Roseville," but to my knowledge there never was an **E. M. Ransbottom** pottery, although his brother Frank seems to have manufactured Bristol-glazed stoneware in South Zanesville for a short time around 1900.

**Edwin. M. Ransbottom**, for whom the presentation jug cooler was made, was born in 1868, the eldest of the four brothers who made Roseville famous. Earlier, in the 1890s he was superintendant of the **Midland Pottery** in the north end of Roseville and later served as vice-president and general manager of the **Ransbottom Brothers Pottery Company**. That pottery of course did not begin until the Ransbottom brothers acquired **John Beem's Oval Ware and Brick Company** in 1900, so the cooler couldn't have been made for or at the **Ransbottom Pottery** in 1895. It actually appears to have been a presentation piece made for **Ed Ransbottom** by the **Knights of Pythias**, whose emblem appears on the front of the cooler. It is unlikely that a commercial pottery would prominently display the logo of a fraternal organization in whatever "storefront" the pottery had.

**Ed Ransbottom** died after suffering a heart attack while traveling on the interurban from Roseville to Zanesville, September 16, 1923 (*Zanesville Times Recorder*, September 17, 1923). He was a Mason but the **Knights of Pythias** was not mentioned in his obituary. On his death, his son **John A. Ransbottom** joined the Board of Directors of **Robinson-Ransbottom** and served until his death in 1955.

**Joe Armstrong** made a very similar presentation piece for **William J. Watt**, founder of the **Brilliant Stoneware Company** of Rose Farm, Morgan County, Ohio, and co-founder with his three sons of the famous **Watt Pottery**. **W. J.**, as it happened, was a brother-in-law of the **Ransbottom** brothers, having married their sister **Almeda** (1861-1944) and he was also a member of the **Knights of Pythias** (*Zanesville Signal*, January 9, 1940), so quite possibly **Watt**

had Armstrong, who worked for him, make the presentation jug for his brother-in-law more or less right after Armstrong created the **Watt** cooler. The double-handled cooler marked **W. J. Watt**, Rose Farm, is dated August 29<sup>th</sup>, 1895, and the **E. M. Ransbottom** cooler is dated October 10, 1895. Both were thrown and jiggered in two separate pieces that were then joined together. Interestingly, on both coolers the rim surrounding the bung-hole appears to have fallen off during the firing.

As for the **Brilliant Stoneware Company**, the plant burned in 1897 and **W. J. Watt** moved to Roseville. **Joe Armstrong** must have followed, for in 1900 he is listed as 37 years old and living on Washington Street in Roseville, along with wife, **Mary [Leota]**, and children **Bluff**, **Goldie May**, **Clara**, **Jeanette**, **Joe T.**, and **Jonny**. Armstrong was listed as a Potter – Jigger. Production at the new **Ransbottom Pottery** did not begin until 1901, but **Ed Ransbottom** must have liked Armstrong's work, for Armstrong worked there for many years. 1910 found him listed as a mold maker and several children were also working in the industry: 21 year old **Bluff** was a turner; daughter **Clara** was a mold carrier; and **Goldie May** was a stippler.

By 1920 the family on Washington Street. had dwindled to wife **Leota**; **Joseph, Jr.**, working as a bookkeeper with the electric company; **John**, a book keeper with a steel plant; and 16 year old **Julia**. **Joseph Armstrong** died Feb 10 1926 at Bethesda Hospital in Zanesville, from a "complication of diseases," aged 65 years, and was buried in Roseville Cemetery. He was a Mason and "a valued employee of the **Ransbottom Pottery**," survived by five children (*Zanesville Times Recorder*, February 11, 1926).

### References

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*Watt Pottery: A Collector's Reference with Price Guide*. Schiffer Publishing, 1994.